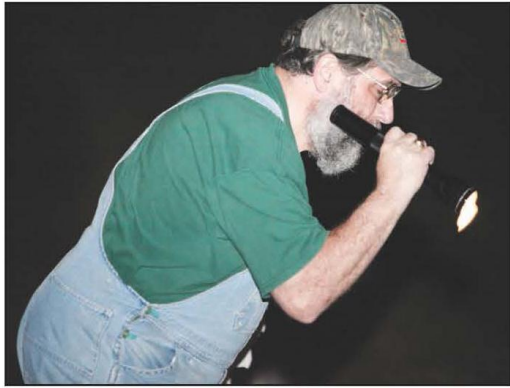


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Paul Dubowey looks and listens for frogs in the Vicksburg National Military Park.

## FROGS ALIVE

*Park's peeper population shows spring is here, summer is soon*

By Josh Edwards  
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In the pitch blackness of Vicksburg National Military Park last week, ranger Virginia DuBowey and her husband, Paul, tuned in with well-trained ears to hear the first peeps, croaks and ribbits of spring.

The park began its annual survey of the frog population Thursday night as the couple made several stops throughout the park to pause and listen

for frogs. To laymen listening for frogs might seem silly, but it serves a good purpose, said Virginia Dubowey, who manages the park's national resource monitoring program.

"Amphibians are very good environmental monitors. They're very susceptible to changes in the environment," she said. "The presence or absence of these species is a good indicator."

The frog survey route consisted

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## Frogs

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of 10 stops each at least a half-mile apart in amphibian-friendly points along drainage ditches and natural water sources — including Durden Creek, Mint Springs and Glass Bayou — throughout the park, she said.

"We have heard at least a dozen species, but they all call at different times of years," Virginia Dubowey said.

At nine of the 10 stops, the researchers heard the calls of spring peepers, one of the first species of frogs to begin calling each year. No other species of frog was recorded.

"In the summer this place will be chock full of bullfrogs," said Paul Dubowey, an



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Ranger Virginia Dubowey talks about varieties of frogs and identification techniques used in the park.

ecologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The call of the tiny spring peepers, who are only about

an inch long, resembles the cheeping of a young chicken. A chorus of the amphibians sounds almost like jingle bells in the distance.

Hearing so many peepers is a sign that the park's ecosystems are healthy, Virginia Dubowey said.

The park might seem far from town to visitors, she said, but U.S. 61 North, Clay Street, the Port of Vicksburg and residential developments are all within close proximity to the park, she said.

"You don't realize how close you are to houses until the winter time when you can see through the trees and hear through the trees. In the

park, you aren't as isolated as you think," she said.

The simple survey consists of listening and recording specific frog calls heard over a 5-minute period, but for the frogs to be active, the weather has to be just right, said Paul DuBowey.

"The two weather factors are temperature and humidity, and it seems like humidity is more important," he said.

The park service also has monitor programs in place for salamanders, white tail deer, bats and other species.